

Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (CA-47), Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam, today led a bi-partisan group of lawmakers in a letter urging Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to confront the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on its continued human rights abuses. Secretary Clinton will be in Hanoi for the East Asia Summit on October 29.

“Secretary Clinton did the right thing when she addressed disturbing human rights abuses in Vietnam at the ASEAN conference in July,” Rep. Sanchez said. “However, the government in Vietnam continues to actively suppress the basic rights of the Vietnamese people.

“The Communist regime is still imprisoning democracy rights activists like Tran Khai Thanh Thuy, who has been beaten repeatedly by police. Government officials continue to use the country's legal system to propagate brutal repression of peaceful democracy rights activists. And they are creating new restrictions on internet freedom, including blocks against Facebook and other social networking sites and reported hacker attacks orchestrated by the Vietnamese authorities.

“My colleagues and I are urging Secretary Clinton to uphold the United States’ commitment to human rights and call out Vietnam's government for its continued abuses.”

Last week, Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez arranged a special dialogue with Kurt Campbell, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and members of the Vietnamese community in Orange County to address the ongoing human rights violations in Vietnam, as well as the cases of Tran Khai Thanh Thuy and Blogger Dieu Cay (Nguyen Hoang Hai). Rep. Sanchez, along with the Vietnamese community leaders, urged the State Department to re-designate Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern for its ongoing violations of religious freedom and make human rights a focal point in America's bilateral conversation with the Government of Vietnam during the upcoming East Asia Summit in Hanoi.

Rep. Sanchez’s letter is co-signed by Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), Rep. Dan Lungren (R-CA), and Rep. Dan Burton (R-IN).

A copy of Rep. Sanchez’s letter is available below:

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We welcome your public comments on human rights at the ASEAN Regional Forum held in Hanoi in July 2010. Like you, we believe that increased political freedom in Vietnam is in the interest of the Vietnamese people as well as the bilateral relationship.

As you return to Vietnam for the East Asia Summit on October 29, 2010, we encourage you to follow-up on your previous statements on human rights and encourage the Vietnamese government to make concrete improvements. Given the ongoing crackdown against political dissent by the Vietnamese government, we believe it is important that you raise specific cases and demand actual progress.

We would like to raise three pressing examples:

- The continued imprisonment of celebrated writer and activist Tran Khai Thanh Thuy. Ms. Thuy was attacked outside her home and arrested by plain-clothes police, yet ironically, she was sentenced to three and a half years imprisonment for “physical assault” in February 2010. According to human rights groups, she was recently beaten in prison in an incident in which the Vietnamese authorities dismissed as a fight with another inmate. We recommend that you call on the Vietnamese government to immediately and unconditionally release Tran Khai Thanh Thuy, as well as all other prisoners detained for peaceful advocacy of their beliefs.
- The use of the legal code to criminalize peaceful political activities. We refer to the recent arrests of four members of Viet Tan, a pro- democracy party. You should urge the Vietnamese government to release professor Pham Minh Hoang, pastor Duong Kim Khai, Ms. Tran Thi Thuy and Mr. Nguyen Thanh Tam. The Vietnamese government should be called on to repeal statutes such as Article 79 (which treats democracy promotion as subversion) and Article 88 (which bans so-called anti-state propaganda).
- The continued restrictions on internet freedom including blocks against Facebook and other social networking sites and reported hacker attacks orchestrated by the Vietnamese authorities. We ask that you press the Vietnamese government to permit Vietnamese citizens to access the websites of their choosing without the intrusion and intimidation of the online police.

By undertaking two visits to Vietnam this year, you have the unique opportunity to advance the bilateral relationship and promote international standards on human rights. We encourage you

to take the opportunity to make human rights a cornerstone of US-Vietnam policy and to demonstrate America's support for the basic freedoms of the Vietnamese people.

Sincerely,